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ABSTRACT

In a discussion of language teacher education, specifically that of native English-speakers to teach English as a Second Language, it is argued that a balance must be found between process-oriented and product-oriented training. It is suggested that this sector of language teacher education has been heavily conditioned to a product-centered approach, which should be re-examined in the current fast-changing context of education. Distinctions between process- and product-focus in teacher training are examined briefly, and some changes in a popular British product-centered course to reflect a process-oriented approach are described. The changes made include both fine-tuning to established procedures and more fundamental revisions. Finally, the elements in preservice teacher education course design that typify process- and product-oriented approaches are summarized. (MSE)

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'Process vs. Product' in Language Teacher Education- Shifting the Focus of Course Design.

Ray Parker

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'PROCESS vs. PRODUCT' IN LANGUAGE TEACHER EDUCATION - SHIFTING THE FOCUS OF COURSE DESIGN

Ray Parker

Introduction

Processes and products are intimately linked. This paper does not set out to sing the praises of the one to the exclusion of the other but rather to propose and describe an adjustment of emphasis in the design of language teacher education programmes.

The paper bases most of its data and propositions on that area of language teacher education concerned with the initial preparation of English native-speaker teachers of English to Speakers of Other Languages. It does so not because it is the writer's belief that this area of language teacher education is in some way more important than others but simply that as a model it has been thoroughly questioned and developed over the last twenty years or so.

The assumption has been made that up to now this sector of language teacher education has been heavily conditioned by a product-centred approach and that our recognition that language teaching takes place in a fast-changing world requires that we question the wisdom of such an approach.

It would be as well to begin by seeking a definition of these two aspects of teacher education.

The Collins Cobuild Dictionary defines *process* as follows:

"A process is a series of actions which are carried out in order to achieve a particular result, e.g. *It has been a long process getting this information.*"

The same dictionary defines *product* as follows:

"Something or someone that is a product of a particular situation or process exists or has particular qualities as a result of that situation or process, e.g. *The uniformity of the dancers was the product of hours of training.*"

At this stage it would be sensible to notice some of the words in these definitions and examples which collocate with our two areas of interest. With 'process' we have the adjective 'long' and with 'product' the associated nouns 'uniformity' and 'training'.

The distinction we are making, then, between process-focused and product-focused courses is essentially the same as Henry Widdowson's well known distinction between teacher education and teacher training:

> "In general terms, the distinction between education and training can be formulated in the following way. Training is a process of preparation towards the achievement of a range of outcomes which are specified in advance. This involves the acquisition of goal-oriented behaviour which is more or less formulaic in character and whose capacity for accommodation to novelty is, therefore, very limited. Training, in this view, is directed at providing solutions to a set of predictable problems and sets a premium on unreflecting expertise. It is dependent on the stability of existing states of affairs since it assumes that future situations will be predictable replicas of those in the past. Education on the other hand is not predicated on predictability in this way. It provides for situations which cannot be accommodated into preconceived patterns of response but which require a reformulation of ideas and the modification of established formulae. It focuses, therefore, not on the application of ready-made problem-solving techniques but on the critical appraisal of the relationship between problem and solution as a matter of continuing enquiry and of adaptable practice."
>
> Widdowson (1990 p.62)

Teacher training, then, is product-focused. It is evaluated in terms of the degree of success it achieves in delivering a pre-determined product which matches a historical model of language teaching needs. Teacher education, on the other hand, is process-focused. The process, here, being valued for its own sake as the means to equip teachers to deal with the unpredictable as well as evaluating and developing their response to the predicted.

An Overview of the Paper

What this paper sets out to do then, is, having defined process and product focusing in the context of language teacher education, to describe some of the modifications we have been making at the TESOL Centre at Sheffield City Polytechnic over the last six years to a popular and successful product-focused course, changes which when viewed in their totality amount to a shift in focus away from the product and towards the process involved. The changes have not finished yet - indeed continuous modification seems to be an almost inevitable result of process-focusing. The changes include both fine-tuning to established procedures and more fundamental revisions and I will try to categorise them as changes to course content, fresh approaches to the evaluation of course participants and modifications to teaching practice components. I will go on finally to summarise the differences in course design of initial teacher education that, for me, typify, and thus help to identify process as opposed to product-focusing. Throughout I will be suggesting that product-focusing implies a belief that an identifiable product can be prepared for an identifiable market and that process-focusing implies the recognition that the demands made upon language teachers are continuously changing and, what's more, changing in ways that are largely unpredictable.

An Anecdote

Part of the process of my being a language teacher educator was my attendance over 10 years ago now at a seminar in Bristol entitled "The Subordination of Teaching to Learning in the Case of the Silent Way" (For a fuller description of this event see McNeill 1982). The seminar was led by the late Caleb Gattegno, the originator of the Silent Way, who chose to demonstrate the methodology to a sub-group of the teachers present by giving a two hour lesson in Arabic. I won't describe the details of the lesson but would say that after it was over he invited questions and comments. One brave teacher pointed out the obvious, and that was that the whole two hour lesson had been quite ex-tempore - Dr Gattegno had been making it up as he went along - it had been - horror of horrors - a totally unprepared lesson! Dr Gattegno appeared to go white with rage - I will not quote his response exactly but a fair paraphrase might be:-

> "You call yourself a teacher? You are a fool! How old do you think I am? I am 67. I have been preparing that lesson for 67 years. How long do you spend preparing your lessons?"

Dr Gattegno believed in and understood the value of process in teacher education and if I gained nothing else from that seminar I came away beginning to realise that no student teacher comes to a teacher training centre without a lifetime's experience of education. The process does not begin with initial teacher training - it continues and teacher educators really ought to realise this. But above all the process must not end with initial teacher training - it must continue and this is something that teacher educators must help new teachers to realise for themselves.

Process - Focused Components of the Sheffield Course

Extended Language Learning Experience

The usefulness of language teachers also being language learners is well attested in a number of articles (Lowe 1987, Rinvolucri 1988, Waters et al 1990). All teachers on our courses are now required to spend part of the first three weeks of the four week course learning a new foreign language. In our case we currently use Norwegian - a language sufficiently exotic for us to feel confident both that no course participant is likely to be anything but a beginner and that no-one is likely to confuse the purpose of the exercise by imagining that we really feel they should learn that particular language. They have a total of thirteen 40 minute lessons in the language - a significant proportion of the total contact hours of the four week course and in addition they are required to attend a final individual 10 minute oral test. This language learning process serves several purposes, but one purpose it does not have, as mentioned before is to teach Norwegian to our student teachers. Few, in any case, have any motivation to learn this language and only one out of the hundreds who have been subjected to this experience has, to my knowledge, ever visited Norway.

What the process, which starts on day two of the course does achieve is to give all the rest of the input of the course a firm reference point. All the theory (a loaded word this for those essential ingredients that help to lift the process from the domain of technical training to professional education) finds exemplification in the on-going language learning experience. Topics such as motivation, second language acquisition theory, methodological variations, psycho- and sociolinguistics, discourse analysis etc. all make more sense if they can be related to "yesterday's Norwegian lesson". Waters et al. (1990) describing a rather more limited application of this sub-process come to similar conclusions:

"In the later stages of the course, the LLE functions as a convenient point of reference - a shared experience that can be referred back to. As the course progresses, it is inevitable that the link between the beginning and 'what we are doing now' can become somewhat remote. The LLE can help to re-establish that connection."

Waters et al (1990:308)

A second obvious purpose is that the prolonged experience of being a language learner dramatically increases teachers' sympathy for and sensitivity towards the language learning difficulties experienced by their own learners, both in concurrent teaching practice situations and in later "real life" classroom encounters.

Finally, and of course, there could be much more to be said about the values and inevitably the disadvantages of ELLE's, there is a sense in which the encouragement of relatively risk-free critical reflection does much to convince the teachers concerned that they are not at the beginning of a process but rather well embarked upon it. The ELLE gives teachers the opportunity to recapture and re-experience the phenomena associated with being a language learner and above all accords some considerable status to the teachers' reflections. This is experiential learning at its best - but more than that - various devices can be set up to ensure that such experience is not simply "had" but is also "learnt from". The net result is that teachers can gently be manoeuvred into actually valuing their own insights and accepting some responsibility for their own development. As Waters et al put it:

"The potential restraint of a body of 'official' input is absent.....As a result, there is an opportunity for the participant to be less concerned with finding the 'right' answer, (a product), and more with identifying the personally significant insight." (focusing on process)

Waters et al (1990:307)

(My additions in brackets)

The Journals System

A journal is a cumulative record - in our case a guided record - of some aspect of the educational process being experienced by the teachers on our courses. It is essentially a diary, though since in our case we choose to look at and assess the journals the term diary, which suggests something essentially private, is avoided in favour of terms like journal or log. More than anything though, a journal is a vehicle for recording reflections on experience in which you can do a number of things:- You can simply record experience or you can reflect on your personal

reaction to that experience or the reactions of others, or you can do your best to record, reflect upon and evaluate these experiences. Even the first, apparently minimalist approach is, in my view, valuable. The mere act of recording experience, if done both regularly and in an unprejudiced way is a powerful reinforcer of that experience. If, however, the additional elements of reflection and self-evaluation are encouraged, the journal becomes a very valuable tool indeed in the process of education.

In our case we impose the keeping of three separate journals on our teachers. They are:

1. The foreign language learning journal

2. The teaching journal

3. The materials compilation journal

They are guided journals in the sense that teachers completing them are provided with headings designed to channel their reflections constructively and incrementally. I have prepared a hand-out with sample pages from these journals. When the course is over, the journals are submitted for assessment by course tutors and then, most importantly, returned to their owners. There is no tutor intervention until the course is over. In fact, in the case of the teaching journal, tutor-feedback from observed lessons is actually withheld until the course participant declares that they have completed the relevant entry to their journal.

One minor aim, then, of the journals is to provide items of assessment. They are assessed in terms of the quality of the insights recorded by their writers and, perhaps more importantly, the evidence that they provide of attitudinal change, self-realised progress, awareness and developing exploitation of strengths and the ability both to identify problems and propose and implement solutions for them.

A far more important aim, however, is the development of a frame of mind, a professional stance of reflection and the nurturing of an ability to gain efficiently from experience. What we are really looking for is a recognition of the value of 'post-paration' as opposed to preparation. The harnessing in a constructive, forward looking way of the power of hindsight. Anyone who has had contact with teachers on teacher education courses will confirm the degree to which Parkinson's law applies itself to the preparation of lessons. In other words, given an hour to prepare a lesson, the lesson will take an hour to prepare. Given a day to prepare the same lesson, the preparation will expand into a full day's work. The

time and energy that lesson preparation can soak up can be truly terrifying but, nevertheless, one thing remains true. We know infinitely more about a lesson after we have given it than we can ever know before. It is logical, therefore, to demand of our teachers that they try to shift the emphasis of their investment of time and energy towards post-paration rather than allow preparation to monopolise their efforts. This is, of course, a long-term rather than a short-term strategy - a process rather than a product focused view and it requires the gradual implementation of quite a severe professional self-discipline.

The success of using journals in teacher education is well recorded in the literature but I would single out a recent article by Scott Thornbury (Thornbury 1991) in which he analyses and notes the usefulness of teaching journals and makes statements such as the following:

> "There also seemed to be a correlation between the capacity to reflect and the effectiveness of the teaching - which is consistent with the view that practice and reflection on practice are inseparable elements of a developmental spiral."
>
> (Thornbury 1991:141)

He also reports partial success in the development of long-term professional processes:

> "One trainee was so enthusiastic that she now plans to continue log-keeping in her post-course teaching."
>
> (Thornbury 1991:141)

Language learning journals are also well represented in the literature of teacher education. The success of their use is well recorded in for example Waters et al and, slightly indirectly, in a most fascinating chapter of Wilga Rivers' book, "Communicating naturally in a second language" - Chapter 13 which should be compulsory reading for all language teachers.

It is the materials compilation journal, however, of the three, which is arguably the most innovative. Many teacher education courses have a materials production component and it is our feeling at Sheffield that such components present course participants with possibly the greatest risk that they will encounter in their language teaching careers, of undertaking an exclusively product focused activity. The MCJ was developed to counter this tendency and to impose a process orientation on to the activity of creating and then using materials. We are regularly reminded of the importance of our interaction with materials. In a recent article

Marion Geddes encourages language teachers to consider not just what materials overtly say to students but also what they covertly suggest and she ends her thoughts with:

> "I know that the worksheets and hand-outs I produce these days have lots of room for improvement. But at least I try to prepare them giving thought not only to the content, but to the 'suggestions' they may make to my students."
>
> (Geddes 1992:30)

The materials compilation journal, then is designed to orient teachers towards just this degree of continuing concern for the effectiveness and impact that even the lowliest hand-out may have.

The Teaching Component

This is, of course, arguably the very heart of any teacher education system and there are a number of process focused measures that we have taken in this area. I would like to describe them under three headings:

The provision of feedback

The means of assessing an individual's response to the teaching component

The modes of teaching employed

Feedback

At a recent meeting of teacher training course moderators a lengthy discussion took place about the wording of a recommendation that was to be made to the examination board for whom they worked. They had been discussing the provision of feedback from observing tutors on the kind of initial course I have been describing and the debate centred upon the choice of adjective to be put before the word feedback. There were various enthusiasms for "immediate", "early" and "prompt". It is of course part of the received wisdom of our profession that in any situation involving some kind of test, the speedier the feedback the more satisfactory it is for those concerned. Part of the legacy of behaviourism is the almost unchallenged belief that the sooner feedback occurs the more likely it is that

some desirable behaviour modification will take place. In the case of observed teaching, however, there is an ironical sense in which immediate feedback from an observing tutor (or early or prompt) is a signal to the teacher that a complete product has been evaluated and a line drawn under it. There is a strong case to be made for delaying feedback, allowing time for reflection or post-paration on the part of the teacher. In our case feedback is provided on the day after the teaching event. This allows a number of things to happen. Firstly, the teacher can record their reflections in the teaching journal unprejudiced by the external observations of the tutor. Secondly, the teacher is given time and a suitable perspective in which to see the lesson as a component of a larger process rather than as an isolated event. Thirdly the teacher has an enhanced opportunity to prepare to take a contributory role during the feedback session rather than a receptive one - in other words the teacher gets an opportunity to be a generator of feedback rather than merely a consumer of it.

Through such a process the teacher is encouraged to develop their own analytical skills, their own judgements about both weaknesses and strengths, and to do so to some extent autonomously so that the wisdom and expertise of the observing tutor comes as the icing on the cake rather than appearing to be the sole valid judgement of the lesson.

Typically, now, feedback sessions start with the teacher revealing the insights they have gained from that particular lesson to the tutor, with the tutor often only intervening to negotiate with the teacher further or more elaborate insights where such an intervention seems necessary and appropriate. Under this system the general quality of feedback sessions has improved enormously and possibly more importantly, tutors have been able to intervene at a much deeper level than had previously been the case. Technical matters tend to be quickly and effectively dealt with if the teacher has recognised them, considered them and can suggest further action or modification to future lesson planning and execution and tutors thus find themselves released into far more valuable areas like suggesting a modification of a teachers overall critical "tone" - many teachers are, for example, unduly negative in their self criticisms, a few are self-congratulatory to an unwarranted degree. Delayed feedback procedures clear the way to such fundamental adjustments on the teacher's part and provide opportunities to negotiate routes to consolidation or change as the circumstances dictate.

In this way the lesson itself ceases to be a product to be evaluated by the observing tutor but becomes part of a process - a process with various components including:

1. preparation

2. optional pre-execution guidance from a tutor

3. the lesson

4. reflection

5. feedback

and instead of assuming massive importance on its own it fits as an important component within a more important and larger, replicable process. For a fuller description of the processes and benefits of delayed feedback you might like to look at my article in the Teacher Trainer. (Parker 1991)

Assessing and Grading the Response of Individuals to the Teaching Component

During a four week course of this sort each teacher can be involved in up to 11 separate teaching events. They could, of course, all be observed and graded separately and, indeed, our practice was to feed such tutor awarded grades into a computer which was then entrusted with the task of 'objectively' weighting the marks depending on the nature of the teaching event and its position in the sequence, and then to average the results out in order to give a final grade for the teaching component of the course.

We found ourselves increasingly ill-at-ease with this number-crunching approach to the labelling of the teaching qualities of human beings.

We have replaced it now with a grades board which meets formally at the end of the course and is composed of all the tutors who have observed any of the teaching events. Each student is discussed in depth and final grades arrived at in a way that allows for consideration to be given to the quality of insights reported from feedback sessions and evidence of self-realised development during the teaching event sequence rather than depending on the teacher's performance in particular lessons, however important that may be.

This system allows tutors to exercise their judgement in a larger sense than in simple performance evaluation and encourages us to stand back from a particular "product" in order to assess how a particular teacher is interacting with a longer process. Final grades, we now feel, are a better indicator of future performance arrived at, as they are, in this holistic, collaborative way, than the accumulations of segmental gradings were.

As an additional safeguard to ensure that final grades are reflections of success with the process rather than indicators of peoples' approximations towards products, the grade arrived at in this way only accounts for a fifty per cent contribution to the final teaching grade - the remaining fifty percent being contributed by the teaching and the materials compilation journals. The result is a grade which says something about the person, not only as a classroom practitioner - the end of an initial course is after all a rather early stage in the process to be making such important judgements - but one which also reflects the individual's ability to analyse their own performance, suggest and implement improvements, recognise and build upon strengths and above all respond to change.

Modes of Teaching Undertaken

On our courses at present, teachers are required to undertake the following modes of teaching:

1. team preparation leading to peer teaching employing a teach-reteach system
2. team preparation leading to team teaching of "normal" classes
3. individual teaching of "normal" classes (observed)
4. individual teaching of "normal" classes (unobserved)
5. "One to one" teaching (one teacher/one student)

It is not unusual in short teacher education courses for activities such as peer teaching to be resisted by course participants and even tutors on the grounds that they are artificial or unrealistic. Such activities are often placed very early in courses as a kind of gentle introduction to the later demands of the "real thing" and this kind of condemnation is very typical of the kind of misplaced narrowly product focused attitude of many novice teachers. Why product focused? Because an

activity can only be perceived as artificial or unrealistic when measured against a supposed end behaviour which is deemed to be natural or realistic. It suggests that at a very early stage in the process people can have a clear idea of what they will be called upon to do after.

A more process focused attitude suggests a number of points:

a) Firstly, a teacher will not be called upon a single well defined role in his or her career

b) Secondly, many future roles are quite unpredictable at any point in time

c) Thirdly that the greater the spread of type of teaching experience gained the more likely it is that a particular teacher will be at least partially equipped for the multiplicity of demands made upon him or her.

A precise match between all early teaching events during an initial course and the future working circumstances of each future teacher is, then, quite impossible - far more important is the possibility that a variety of different teaching experiences may lead the teacher towards the ability to respond flexibly and confidently whatever demands the future may hold in store. Again the process seems far more important than the product particularly since the odds against defining the product accurately are very high and even if apparently achieved will restrict the teacher to coping with the status quo but will not necessarily equip him or her to adapt to new developments.

Pre- and Post-course Activity

It would be reasonable at this stage to question how four week courses, given their brevity and position with regards to the rest of someone's teaching career, can really be viewed as part of a process. To many they seem to have the same status in relation to a teaching career as does the starter motor on a car in relation to a long motorway journey. In other words, it is an essential pre-requisite - the car will not start without it - but once used it is separate from, literally disconnected from, the main business of driving along. Again this is something that has exercised our minds in Sheffield and to some extent we have solved the problem in two ways. Firstly we use a good deal of distance learning. The courses I have been partially describing are intensive four week periods sandwiched within a relatively long 15 week distance learning phase. This is not optional preparation and follow-up but an essential prolongation of the intensive experience. The

distance learning periods both before and after the intensive block help to merge the experiences of the face to face course into both the pre-course and post-course life of each teacher.

The "Part One" Principle

The "part one" principle is the label I have given to the current drive at Sheffield to encourage course participants there and eventually at other Institutions offering similar courses to look upon the course as part one of a still longer process. In our case it can be followed a year later by an advanced course leading to the award of a postgraduate diploma, the two courses being linked by an intervening period of further distance learning.

In this way the initial education period is stretched to about a year and a half, habits of self-evaluation and monitoring are reinforced and it is hoped successful teaching careers will develop.

A Summary and Comparison of Elements of Product and Process Focused Courses

Product Focused Courses	Process Focused Courses
Single foreign language lesson (presumably for shock value)	Series of foreign language lessons - for cumulative reflection and backed up by a journal
four week intensive course	extensions of distance learning either side of course together with possibility of extended further study
pattern of justified presentation, practice and immediate application of techniques	separation of input from output
immediate feedback from teaching practice - i.e. a testing principle	delayed feedback from teaching backed up by a journal
concentration on discrete item materials production	materials production a by-product of teaching - backed up by a journal

This paper was not meant, as I implied at the beginning, to be a propaganda exercise on behalf of the "process party" to the detriment of all considerations of the product. It is, of course, a matter of common sense that any process of teacher education, particularly an initial one must be able to claim that its participants leave it equipped to cope with at least the most predictable and common classroom situations. The process orientation of such courses must be reasonably balanced. There is amongst our novice teachers an understandable thirst for formulae, for recipes, for tried and tested techniques that will help them to face classes with confidence. This is a short term need of which our teachers are arguably more aware than of the longer-term needs addressed by the process elements of the course. It would be churlish to deny it, when it is easily and quite rapidly satisfied and, indeed in these days when teachers are being constantly enjoined to take a learner-centred stance it would be and would appear to be quite wrong to do so. We inject into the course, then, on a more or less daily basis, teaching techniques sessions lasting about half an hour where a particular technique is presented and evaluated. Similarly other longer sessions are devoted to the practicalities of teaching the four skills, exploiting and creating materials etc. etc. Quite deliberately, however, many of the techniques presented are not immediately applicable to the classes that our teachers are meeting in the teaching component of the course. Seldom can they be taken up as a quick fix for the evening's observed lesson. Rather they serve as seedcorn for the repertoire of techniques and procedures that each teacher will develop for themselves in the years to come. Even here, however, the impact of a process approach is evident. Perhaps the most telling sign is in the usage and vocabulary of the TESOL Centre staff. It is rare now to hear anyone talking about the way to do something - a way is much more common. Teaching practice has been replaced by teaching, trainees by teachers, teacher trainer by teacher educator or tutor etc. etc.

Conclusions

Language teaching is taking place in a fast changing world. The education and preparation of teachers should reflect this. We can, I believe, perceive two distinct tendencies in teacher education and training - product focusing and process focusing. Language teachers like everyone else have a past, a present and a future. If we locate the teacher education course for the sake of argument in the present and if we agree that the future is largely uncharted territory - even for the whole profession let alone for individual members of it - then we have two ways of using the past. With a product-focused course we make the assumption that the past can be used to define the future. We thus use the past to help us generate our products. If the future makes unpredicted demands on our products they are unlucky. Sooner

or later it is bound to and in a sense the consumers of our products intuitively recognise that they come with a "use before date" and a limited shelf-life. I know several schools of English which as a matter of policy anticipate replacing all or most of their teaching staff on an annual basis.

With a process focused approach, on the other hand, we equip our teachers to genuinely exploit their own presents and pasts in a relatively continuous fashion so that they themselves can deal with their own futures.

A great Spanish poet, Antonio Machado, put this better in ten short lines than I have managed to do in forty long minutes:

Caminante, son tus huellas
el camino, y nada mas;
caminante, no hay camino,
se hace camino al andar.
Al andar se hace camino,
y al volver la vista atras
se ve la senda que nunca
se ha de volver a pisar
Caminante no hay camino,
sino estelas en la mar.

Traveller, your footsteps are
the road, and nothing else;
traveller, there is no path,
you make the path up as you walk along.
As you walk along, you make the path up,
and if you turn and look back
you can see the path you'll never
get to tread again.
Traveller, there is no path,
Only the wake you leave behind on the sea.

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